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Evaluation

Management response to the evaluation of the UNDP contribution to strengthening electoral systems and processes

Context and background

1. UNDP promotes democratic governance for its intrinsic value in advancing rights, principles and justice and for its agency towards larger human development in which people have a crucial say in the decisions that affect their lives. Strong and accountable institutions must be balanced with strong and inclusive civic engagement, just as credible and inclusive elections must go hand in hand with efforts to ensure that all people have the opportunity to participate in the political life of their countries. For this reason, UNDP promotes democratic governance through three areas of work: inclusive participation, responsive institutions and international principles. As per its current strategic plan 2008-2013, UNDP works to foster inclusive participation by strengthening civic engagement at the local, regional and national levels. Mechanisms and opportunities for this engagement include electoral laws, institutions and processes, mobilization channels (such as political parties and civil society organizations), and communications channels (access to information networks, e-governance and independent media). Within the specific service area of electoral assistance, UNDP supports the electoral laws, processes and institutions that strengthen inclusive participation and professional electoral administration.

2. The main trend in electoral assistance over the past decade has been the widespread adoption of the electoral cycle approach, a tool that UNDP has been in the forefront of promoting. This approach has its roots in the realization that electoral assistance providers were supporting isolated, one-off events every four or five years but not building the requisite capacity, sustainability and national ownership that would allow programme countries to run elections on their own, credibly, with progressively less international support. Despite the wealth of knowledge and experience acquired through electoral assistance initiatives, donor and United Nations interventions were often guided more by isolated, short-term policy objectives than by long-term, broad development cooperation strategies. Focusing on election events also made it difficult to integrate electoral assistance into the broader democratic governance agenda.

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3. UNDP formally adopted the electoral cycle approach as its modus operandi following the meeting it hosted in November 2004 of the United Nations and non-United Nations electoral community-of-practice whose members recommended that the electoral cycle approach would be more effective in achieving UNDP goals as a development organization. The cycle approach emphasizes engaging in a country over a longer period of time than simply one election, and it features engagement with a variety of actors and entry points, including, but going beyond, the electoral management body (EMB). It also acknowledges the importance of election events and supporting them but provides the means to do so within a larger framework.

4. In 2011, UNDP provided electoral cycle assistance to approximately 60 countries, just under half of which also received UNDP elections support. In responding to demand, 65 per cent of country offices are using the electoral cycle approach in programming. To support this effort, UNDP launched a three-year, $35 million Global Programme on Electoral Cycle Support (GPECS) in 2009 to help countries improve their electoral laws, processes and institutions and to enhance the participation of women in electoral processes. Electoral assistance consistently accounts for a high degree of expenditure within democratic governance, which means that, given the relatively small number of country offices with projects in the area compared to other governance areas, each electoral project has a comparatively high average expenditure.

5. In light of the highly political nature of elections, the General Assembly in 1991 appointed the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) as United Nations focal point for electoral assistance. This role was intended to provide a consistent response to requests by Member States for electoral assistance and to channel such requests to the appropriate responder within the United Nations system. UNDP core technical electoral assistance capacity has increased steadily over the past 20 years and its development agenda, democratic governance expertise and coordination responsibility together position it to play the lead electoral assistance provider role in non-peacekeeping/political mission settings. The current division of labour between DPA and UNDP in electoral assistance is as follows: DPA provides normative policy, standard and electoral assistance parameter setting and UNDP provides leadership in the provision of technical assistance, advisory services and lessons learned. Mission contexts are distinct in that a mission is usually given an electoral mandate by the Security Council, which defines the United Nations role over and above what UNDP will do through the country programme. Other important partnerships in electoral assistance include United Nations Volunteers (UNV), which provides key personnel who deliver electoral assistance in many contexts, in particular post-conflict settings, and UN Women, with which UNDP works to promote women's political participation.

6. In recognition of the key role electoral institutions and processes play in achieving development and democratic governance results, the UNDP 2012 annual business plan (ABP) includes electoral assistance among its 12 corporate annual priorities.

Achievements, recommendations and the way forward

7. Electoral assistance is a mature service area for UNDP. The organization has built up a considerable body of knowledge and expertise at the headquarters, regional and country levels. All of these levels make combined up a community of practice consisting of some 100 practitioners for whom providing electoral assistance represents the majority of their functions either through a country-specific project or in an advisory capacity. This community is further enlarged by the wider democratic governance community, which at times deals with electoral support as well.

8. UNDP has developed knowledge and good practices in the field of electoral assistance, including on themes such as elections and conflict, political party engagement, women's political participation, and use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in elections. For example, in 2011-2012 in partnership with the National Democratic Institute, UNDP developed a "Best Practices Guidebook for Political Parties to Promote Women's Political Participation" – now considered the global handbook on how political parties can promote women's political participation throughout the electoral cycle.

9. Within the United Nations itself and even beyond, strong partnerships have formed around electoral assistance-related work, with electoral assistance providers in the north and south and through global initiatives such as the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network and Building Resources for Democracy, Governance and Elections (BRIDGE). UNDP has also developed strong partnerships with bilateral and multilateral institutions, including most notably with the European Union, with which UNDP developed operational guidelines to help European Union delegations and UNDP country offices work together in the field better. By serving as the custodian of donor funds for electoral assistance, UNDP has developed the capacity to manage large and complex basket funds by bringing the fund and partnership management aspects together with strong technical expertise.

10. The evaluation provides a comprehensive and positive review of the role and achievements of UNDP in electoral assistance and clearly states that: UNDP assistance has been instrumental in the holding of credible elections in complex, post-conflict environments and sensitive political transitions; its contribution resulted in more professional electoral management, more inclusive processes and more credible elections than would have been the case without its assistance; and in some cases elections simply would not have happened without UNDP support and that of its donors and partners. It also states that UNDP is the only organization able to represent national as well as international interests, situate the pieces of assistance within the broader framework of electoral and democratic development and provide this larger sense of purpose, which are all factors that make UNDP 'irreplaceable'.

11. At the same time, the evaluation points to certain areas where UNDP can strengthen its impact. These include integrating electoral assistance more into democratic governance programming; ensuring that the electoral cycle is properly applied; connecting better the UNDP principles-based framework for electoral assistance with country office realities; looking at key partnerships; advocating more consistently for cost-effective and sustainable technological solutions; and improving internal efficiencies.

12. Before addressing the recommendations on their merits, it is useful to distinguish between what is within UNDP control to address versus what is beyond it, as well as what recommendations relate to UNDP support to electoral systems and processes per se versus what recommendations go beyond it, either into broader democratic governance support or to the overall 'rules of game'. These distinctions are important in order to shape the management response in terms of tangible, specific and implementable actions that effectively address the recommendations.

13. For example, the first recommendation notes that UNDP needs to intensify its efforts to build a shared sense of purpose between headquarters, country offices and projects, as well as to improve general understanding of its approach and programming. This is a key objective of the agenda for organizational change (AOC) launched in 2011, which seeks to improve the performance and consistency of UNDP in all areas. The second

recommendation notes that UNDP should find a way to frame its relationships with national authorities so as to balance United Nations impartiality with long-standing relationships in country. This recommendation, while relevant for electoral assistance, addresses an institutional challenge of the resident coordinator system and speaks to the difficulty of reconciling the different demands placed on the United Nations representative by national counterparts, international partners and the United Nations system itself. At the same time, UNDP has always been credited with being impartial by a broad spectrum of national and international actors.

14. As a highly decentralized organization that engages closely with host governments, UNDP adapts its approach from country to country based on the needs and entry points available. It may not always be possible to adhere to a single approach and country offices may programme electoral assistance in a way that reflects the opening available to them. Therefore, the issue may be less a lack of understanding in the UNDP approach and its options so much as a conscious choice based on contextual limitations. In responding to these recommendations UNDP will balance the need for consistency with the specific needs of the country. Nevertheless, management does take the point that more effort should be made to ensure that policy guidance informs programming and leads to more even performance – for example, by making routine the participation of regional service centre and headquarters (New York and Brussels) electoral and governance advisors in the needs assessment and project formulation processes, particularly if the country office and/or its management are new to electoral assistance. Another option is to encourage country offices to share more systematically electoral assistance projects under development with relevant policy advisors for quality assurance feedback. This may also include gender advisors to ensure that gender equality concerns are routinely addressed in electoral assistance projects.

15. The evaluation also makes two complementary recommendations: first, that UNDP should strengthen its implementation of the electoral cycle approach and, second, that it should develop upfront clear exit strategies when beginning electoral support. As pointed out by the evaluation, a major factor affecting implementation of the electoral cycle approach is 'discordant donor priorities' at country level. A review of budgets reveals that UNDP multi-year projects that aim to work primarily on electoral capacity development over the entire electoral cycle still spend on average $0.50 of every dollar on election-specific support, pointing to the pervasiveness of the election event agenda. This can affect the timeliness and availability of donor funding in the 'inter-election' period in small and large programmes; for example, in contexts as different as Afghanistan and the Maldives, where electoral cycle initiatives were designed years before elections but languished because of lack of donor funds. Late funding can effectively transform an electoral cycle project into an election-specific one. It can also drive up budgets. For example, when procurement processes are undertaken shortly before an election rather than with time to spare, the options are greatly reduced, sometimes making the most expensive solution the only viable option. Other challenges in effectively implementing the electoral cycle approach include setting up semi-permanent electoral management bodies or late appointment of electoral commissioners; the reluctance of some governments to work in the immediate post-electoral period; and the preference to invest in 'core' areas such as electoral management body support rather than 'complementary' areas such as political party, electoral dispute, civil society or media support.

16. Notwithstanding the challenges of implementing the electoral cycle approach, management agrees that UNDP does not place sufficient emphasis in its project design on establishing clear nationally owned benchmarks for progress in capacities and

institution building that would call for a reduction and eventual cessation of international support. UNDP has seen that full implementation of the cycle approach reduces electoral project budgets over time – including spending on election day support – and UNDP staff providing in-country assistance. Some Member States, such as Brazil, Mexico and South Africa, have transformed from 'net importers' of United Nations electoral assistance to providers of expertise and South-South support. In such cases, the role of UNDP has evolved from that of technical assistance provider to broker of knowledge, standards, partnerships and information. In other cases, such as in the Pro-PALOP[1] and SADC-ECF[2] regional projects, UNDP brokers South-South exchanges among electoral management bodies. In responding to this recommendation, UNDP needs to address a two-fold challenge: how to work together as a development community to implement the electoral cycle approach in a manner that addresses the challenges while planning in a more purposeful manner; and, as national capacities are built, recalibrating UNDP assistance in order to render electoral assistance redundant.

17. Key actions proposed in response to the findings build on on-going work in many areas and comprise four types of initiatives: (a) *policy*: finalize with DPA the guidelines for needs assessments and provide quality assurance support to country offices designing electoral assistance; (b) *programming*: plan earlier and bring operational expertise to bear at the inception phase, design electoral assistance using institutional and context analysis, build capacity of project managers to raise and advocate regional and international norms and standards in a variety of political contexts, and build on good practices of integrating electoral assistance with other areas of governance; (c) *knowledge*: finalize lessons learning exercises on long-term/electoral cycle and integrated electoral assistance, promote more cross-regional knowledge sharing and sharing of experiences between UNDP senior managers, and promote greater use of the electoral community of practice; and (c) *partnerships*: clarify the division of roles and responsibilities in the United Nations system through follow up with the Policy Committee of the Secretary-General, use strategic analysis in needs assessments of what UNDP should do vis-à-vis other actors, and better engage DPA on the political front.

18. UNDP will continue to advocate for the electoral cycle approach and to deepen and refine understanding within the electoral community of practice of how this approach contributes to national capacity, ownership, sustainability and cost effectiveness in electoral processes. The findings and recommendations of the on-going UNDP study to codify "Lessons learned on the longer-term impact of United Nations electoral assistance", which looks at Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Georgia, Liberia, Mexico, Mozambique and the occupied Palestinian territories, will be critical in this respect. Routine UNDP participation in DPA-led needs assessment missions will also help ensure that the parameters of electoral assistance take into account the longer-term, capacity development perspective and linkages to democratic governance from the outset. In addition, the pre-electoral, electoral and post-electoral assessments that UNDP undertakes as a matter of course throughout the programming cycle will place greater emphasis on sustainability, ownership, capacity and cost effectiveness.

19. The evaluation also highlights that UNDP has begun to promote more systematically the empowerment of women in the electoral cycle. This support has ranged from ensuring support for women to participate as voters, building capacity for women candidates and reviewing electoral legislation to promoting women's inclusion through,

[1] Project in Support of Electoral Cycles in African Portuguese-speaking Countries and Timor-Leste (PALOP-TL).

[2] South African Development Community Electoral Commissions Forum.

for example, temporary special measures or quotas. However, it notes that achievements in gender programming in electoral assistance have greatly depended on the commitment of individuals, notably chief technical advisors (CTAs). The evaluation, however, also notes that progress has been made through GPECS, which prioritizes gender as one of four key entry points in electoral assistance and provides dedicated financial and human resources, including technical expertise on gender and elections at a senior level. The UNDP Gender Steering and Implementation Committee (GSIC) has also commended the success of the GPECS model in mainstreaming gender. Therefore, UNDP will continue to ensure that gender is mainstreamed systemically in electoral assistance.

20. UNDP will also make use of new tools and approaches in its electoral assistance work. For example, adapting the new institutional and contextual analysis tool to the specific area of electoral assistance will help to design electoral assistance and deepening democracy programmes so that the political settlement is sufficiently addressed from the outset. UNDP will continue and make greater use of integrated approaches to designing electoral assistance that draw on all parts of the house in countries such as Kenya, where the Regional Bureau for Africa (RBA), Bureau for Development Policy (BDP) and Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR), with the country office and regional centre, have come together to design a strategic framework for programming around the next elections.

21. Building on significant work done in recent years, UNDP will continue to explore appropriate use of information technology in electoral management and advocate for informed decisions that lead to sustainable outcomes. This will involve ensuring that adequate internal capacity exists in UNDP to advise programme countries on the planning, management, procurement, operations, budgeting and inter-institutional collaboration required when introducing new technologies. While UNDP will do all it can to limit costs in electoral assistance and will look at how this can be done better, timely availability of funding would help to keep costs low.

22. UNDP will also continue to explore ways of improving the efficiency of its delivery. While UNDP has put in place strong systems and tools, making its operational processes among the fastest and leanest in the United Nations system, it can do more to encourage early planning and to build absorptive capacity of country offices taking on the increased burden of recruitment, procurement and financial management that often comes with electoral assistance. UNDP will encourage greater use of fast track procedures for country offices providing support to elections. UNDP will also seek to improve the efficiency of delivery through participation in the Operational Support Working Group launched by the Policy Committee of the Secretary-General. This group comprises DPA, Department of Field Services (DFS), Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), UNOPS and UNDP and will make recommendations on how to improve the efficiency of United Nations operational response in elections. UNDP will also explore the comprehensiveness and accuracy of electoral assistance reporting, in particular in the results-oriented annual report (ROAR).

23. UNDP welcomes this evaluation and appreciates the lessons that it provides for continuous organizational improvements. The annex on the following pages outlines the evaluation's main recommendations and the UNDP responses.

List of acronyms

ABP	annual business plan
AOC	agenda for organizational change
BCPR	Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery
BDP	Bureau for Development Policy
BRIDGE	Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections
CPD	country programme document
CPAP	country programme action plan
CSO	civil society organization
CTA	chief technical advisor
DFS	Department of Field Services
DGG	Democratic Governance Group
DPA	Department of Political Affairs
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
EAD	Electoral Assistance Division (of DPA)
EMB	electoral management body
ICMEA	Inter-Agency Coordinating Mechanism on Electoral Assistance
ICT	information and communication technology
NAM	needs assessment mission
PALOP	*Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa* (Portuguese speaking African countries)
PSO	Procurement Support Office
ROAR	results-oriented annual report
RSC	regional service centre
SADC-ECF	Electoral Commissions Forum of the Southern African Development Community
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNV	United Nations Volunteers

Annex. Key recommendations and management response

Recommendation 1: UNDP should intensify efforts to build the shared sense of purpose among headquarter, country office and project teams, and to improve their understanding of the UNDP approach and programming options for electoral assistance. UNDP should ensure that its institutional frameworks, vision for electoral assistance and how these fit within the broader United Nations electoral assistance framework are more fully understood by staff and key stakeholders working at the country level. This should include training for country office and project staff on how UNDP promotes the normative United Nations values and fulfils an impartial role in the provision of electoral assistance. UNDP should better leverage the considerable amount of its knowledge products and in-house expertise through more systematic dissemination, networking efforts and follow-up to its community of practice meetings. UNDP should also consider more intensive and comprehensive induction training – on the organization's institutional vision and implementation guidelines electoral assistance – for new resident representatives, chief technical advisers, senior country office management and governance unit staff.

Management response: This recommendation is very much in line with the UNDP AOC, which calls for improving performance 'from good to great' so that UNDP programming and implementation consistently lead to positive impact. The AOC means that UNDP will use the best configuration of knowledge, policy, programme and corporate services to support consistently high quality electoral assistance delivery at the country level. The actions proposed here form part of a larger organizational effort that goes beyond addressing the issues raised in the present evaluation and that seeks to standardize UNDP performance on the ground – not just in the area of elections but overall. UNDP will do more to make policies and guidance easily available – in particular through Teamworks – to encourage cross-regional information sharing. UNDP will also make greater use of in-house expertise through a strengthened quality assurance function for electoral assistance design, in particular by regional centre and headquarters advisors. UNDP will also make greater use of regional electoral workshops and trainings to contribute to consistency and effectiveness. Finally, senior country office leadership plays a particularly important role in framing the dialogue with the government on UNDP electoral assistance and will be engaged more through management/cluster meetings and training to build coherence.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Comments	Status
1.1 Improve cross-regional collaboration to share lessons and approaches in UNDP electoral assistance such as during global management meetings and regional bureau/cluster meetings.	On-going	Regional bureaux, BDP, regional centres		
1.2 Develop a stronger quality assurance role in the design of electoral assistance projects that makes use of in-house expertise.	Within 1 year	BDP and BCPR, with regional bureaux		
1.3 Ensure electoral policies and guidance are easily available, accessible and frequently updated using the Teamworks platform and other methods.	Within 6 months	BDP		
1.4 Ensure UNDP input to DPA/EAD-produced guidelines on needs assessment missions and types and principles of United Nations electoral assistance and ensure their distribution to country offices.	Within 3 months	BDP (engaging DPA), regional bureaux		

Recommendation 2: UNDP should assess the way it frames relationships with national authorities for electoral projects and develop a model that embodies United Nations impartiality within its long-standing relationship within a country. UNDP should guard its reputation as an impartial provider of electoral assistance, because this reputation can play a critical role in managing local political dynamics while promoting the broader requirements of electoral integrity. UNDP should ensure that its involvement in an electoral process serves as a mark of legitimacy, providing confidence to electoral management bodies to take the right decisions and dissuading nondemocratic forces from making frivolous claims or disrupting the process. UNDP should ensure that all country offices are aware of the option of providing support based on a request from an electoral management body. UNDP should focus its technical and normative assets on strengthening these independent institutions to enhance their standing in society and reinforce the political role they play as arbiters of the electoral contest.

Management response: It is the DPA-led needs assessment process that continues to set the parameters of UNDP electoral assistance and requests from EMBs are still considered exceptional, with the executive branch more often seen as the initiator of such requests to the United Nations. UNDP will advocate more to consider the EMB as a routine source of electoral requests. Electoral assistance – like democratic governance and even development – features both political and technical dimensions. UNDP believes that the solution to political challenges in the electoral field is not to distinguish further between the political and technical dimensions, but rather to manage the political aspects in a manner that allows UNDP to maintain the highest level of impartiality. This can entail calling on DPA services when and as needed. In peacekeeping or mission contexts, this will mean clearly distinguishing the lead political role of the mission from the technical role that UNDP plays, while designing the technical assistance to take into account the political context. UNDP will explore ways to sensitize senior UNDP officials more on the lessons learned with respect to the political-technical relationship and to what role DPA can provide. UNDP electoral assistance projects usually feature clear reporting lines of CTAs to the UNDP country office (normally to the head of governance or to the senior country office management) in order to reinforce the chain of accountability and communication through which electoral assistance is closely aligned to the UNDP country office's democratic governance work.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
2.1 Sensitize senior country office and electoral staff – taking advantage of inductions of resident coordinators, country directors and deputy country director and other opportunities – to the fact that they can rely on DPA to provide political support or interventions on international norms and standards.	On-going	Learning Resource Centre, United Nations Staff College, regional bureaux, country offices, BDP		
2.2 Finalize lessons learned study with DPA and DPKO on integrated electoral assistance for recommendations on the division of labour between missions and UNDP.	Third quarter 2012	BDP (engaging DPA and DPKO), BCPR		
2.3 Input to DPA/EAD-drafted needs assessment mission and principles and type of electoral assistance guidelines to expand consideration of requests for electoral assistance from EMBs.	Second quarter 2012	BDP (engaging DPA), BCPR and regional bureaux		

Recommendation 3: UNDP should ensure a more consistent grounding of electoral assistance in the broader democratic governance framework to better incorporate the values of that framework. UNDP should more firmly ground electoral assistance in its larger democratic governance programme to give more meaning to its support. Specifically, this means working more systematically to build synergies among different democratic governance programmes, some of which may already be assisting women's groups, civil society advocates, media, political parties and members of parliament. This process should start by taking advantage of existing opportunities and becoming more systematized as part of the country programme action plan process. This requires better diagnosis of governance issues and designing the governance programme, including electoral assistance, around that analysis. In contexts marked by a lack of political will, and where repeated electoral technical assistance has not resulted in the envisioned outcomes, UNDP should ensure that country offices are given full headquarters and regional support through mentoring and backstopping. In cases where there is no political will for competitive multi-party processes, UNDP should carefully assess its support options, as assisting parts of a process under such circumstances is tacit approval of them. Country offices with upcoming electoral events should be prioritized for training on the organization's new political economy-based analysis and on how to integrate this political analysis into soft and hard assistance. Strengthening contextual analyses and integrating early warning systems into electoral assistance programming could help country offices and regional bureaux to identify potential triggers for electoral conflict and develop mitigation and prevention responses at the policy and technical levels.

Management response: Elections are one input into UNDP democracy and governance work. In and of themselves, elections offer value as a unique and sufficient development goal. However, many linkages between elections and the broader governance framework exist with the electoral cycle approach and ensuring greater traction for the approach will also help to ensure more linkages between electoral assistance and work with political parties, civil society, including women's groups, media, domestic observers, security forces, parliaments and the judiciary. When electoral assistance is identified in the CPD/CPAP, linkages with other areas of UNDP work in country (and regionally) are identified at that time. UNDP will use the findings and recommendations from its study on longer-term electoral assistance to identify ways of using the electoral cycle approach better in environments where focus on the EMB per se may not be yielding the desired results. Similarly, UNDP will use the findings from the study on gender mainstreaming in electoral assistance and other knowledge products to identify key entry for gender mainstreaming in the electoral cycle. UNDP will also make better use of institutional and contextual analysis and collaborative cross bureaux (BDP-BCPR-regional bureaux) approaches to programme development (both country programmes and sector projects). In cases where there is no political will for competitive, multi-party processes, UNDP should carefully assess its options for support. It is crucial that UNDP is fully associated with the political analysis of the NAMs and does not limit its contribution to the design of future potential electoral projects. It is the DPA-led needs assessment process that continues to set the parameters of UNDP electoral assistance and the final decision on whether to assist a country lies with DPA. Country offices should be fully associated with the decision-making the political analysis provided to DPA since they need to take NAM recommendations forward with counterparts and are best placed to highlight the sensitivities and appropriateness of any given support.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
3.1 Adapt the institutional and contextual analysis methodology to the electoral assistance area.	By third quarter 2012	BDP (including OGC)		
3.2 Identify electoral assistance and democratic governance synergies in the CPD/CPAP when possible and at project design phase, in particular in ABP priority countries.	On-going	Regional bureaux, country offices, BDP and BCPR		
3.3 Finalize the lessons learned study on the longer-term impact of United Nations electoral assistance and the study on gender mainstreaming in electoral assistance.	By second quarter 2012	BDP		

Recommendation 4: Beyond addressing technical needs, UNDP programmes should strategically focus on the areas of critical need for credible, inclusive processes. UNDP should be strategic in the choice of areas where it offers assistance. It should concentrate on ensuring that the most essential needs of the process are covered through its mobilization and coordination role and, in conjunction with national and international partners, determine which partners are best placed and able to address specific needs. This process should be based on sound analysis of the political and electoral context, prioritization of needs and a clear exit strategy. UNDP should ensure that its own programmes effectively leverage its United Nations status, multinational nature and development mandate, and that such programmes focus directly on strengthening the credibility of the processes assisted. In particular, UNDP should do more to exploit its convening capabilities and its comparative advantage of facilitating national dialogue on needed electoral reforms and reducing the winner-takes-all nature of electoral systems. Strengthening multiparty political systems should be a part of this process.

Management response: This recommendation assumes that UNDP is trying to do everything everywhere, which is not confirmed by a close reading of what country offices are actually doing in electoral assistance, which tends to be fairly focused. What does bear scrutiny, however, is whether UNDP is taking the most strategic approach in a given context, which is rarely a factor of UNDP decision-making alone. In several countries, UNDP had designed electoral cycle approach projects that prioritized work with actors such as political parties that were deemed essential to peaceful and inclusive elections based on thorough analysis. However, these activities were considered by other actors as 'complementary' and ultimately dropped by the project when funding and priority were instead placed on 'core' electoral management. Greater advocacy therefore needs to be done in-house and with donors to recognize that work with the EMB alone may not be the best or only entry point for UNDP. Donors and EMBs also sometimes come to UNDP as the provider of last resort. This is a role that many will presumably continue to ask of UNDP in general and is not isolated to electoral assistance. In these contexts, the ability of UNDP to respond is highly appreciated by partners, so much so that in some cases if UNDP were to limit its areas of support it may present a reputational risk for the organization. At the same time, UNDP will do more to design electoral assistance projects with clear benchmarks for progress and, where possible, seek to transform and reduce its role over time to meet changing needs. This entails understanding the trajectory of countries that have been net 'importers' of United Nations electoral assistance, but are now providers of peer support, and knowing how UNDP can use the electoral cycle in each context to accompany programme countries along this pathway.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
4.1 Input on DPA/EAD-drafted needs assessment mission guidelines to identify early UNDP comparative advantages and to eliminate division between 'core' and 'complementary' activities.	Second quarter 2012	BDP (engaging DPA), BCPR and regional bureaux		
4.2 Use the institutional and contextual analysis adapted to electoral assistance to design electoral assistance projects that take into account winner-takes-all politics.	After third quarter 2012, then on-going	Country offices, regional bureaux, BDP, BCPR		
4.3 Use the lessons learned study on the longer-term impact of United Nations electoral assistance to identify strategies for evolving electoral assistance from large-scale technical assistance to partnership over time.	After second quarter 2012, then on-going	BDP, regional bureaux, country offices		

Recommendation 5: UNDP should prioritize efforts to clarify the application of the United Nations electoral assistance policy framework to more effectively fulfil the institutional mandate of development assistance. UNDP should seek to resolve the differences arising from the application of the United Nations electoral assistance policy framework where it affects UNDP ability to fulfil its development mandate. Senior UNDP managers should engage with the United Nations focal point to discuss these issues and seek a synergistic application of the framework so that UNDP, as well as other United Nations organizations, are able to make the best use of their institutional mandates in support of these important national processes. UNDP should continue its efforts through the Inter-Agency Coordinating Mechanism on Electoral Assistance (ICMEA) to resolve operational issues.
Management response: Decisions 2010/23 and 2011/23 of the Policy Committee of the Secretary-General have sought to clarify pending issues of division of labour among different parts of the United Nations system working in electoral assistance, from how policy is formulated to how the United Nations should respond to demands for electoral assistance from Member States. DPA and UNDP have also signed a Note of Guidance on Electoral Assistance (most recently in September 2010) that governs their division of labour in this area. However, differences in interpretation of this guidance continue to affect implementation in the field. These differences largely relate to interpretations of what it means for the United Nations focal point to have a normative and political role in setting the broad parameters of electoral assistance and what it means for UNDP (or other United Nations actors) to take the lead in designing and delivering technical assistance at the request of Member States, respecting these parameters. UNDP will continue to work at the technical level, through the ICMEA, to better collaborate with DPA and share information on approaches used by UNDP at country level with national and international partners to design and deliver electoral assistance. UNDP will also engage through senior management with DPA to ensure that the division of labour and policy guidance in this area is mutually understood and consistently applied by DPA and UNDP in a manner that allows UNDP to deliver on its development mandate.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
5.1 Senior-level UNDP engagement with DPA on the policy framework governing elections and clarification of how to implement Policy Committee guidance.	By third quarter 2012	Executive Office, BDP, BCPR, regional bureaux		
5.2 Participate in the ICMEA regularly to ensure information sharing and mutual understanding of mandates and constraints.	On-going	BDP, with BCPR and regional bureaux		

Recommendation 6: UNDP should strengthen implementation of electoral cycle projects so they are able to retain their process-oriented focus. UNDP should strengthen its efforts to fully implement electoral cycle projects by focusing on the process alongside the event. UNDP should provide country offices, chief technical advisers and project teams with training on the electoral cycle approach, improve dissemination of implementation guidelines and promote increased networking and peer-to-peer exchanges among electoral management bodies and civil society organizations in the period between electoral events. UNDP should also leverage the range of entry points in an electoral cycle approach to reach media, political parties, legislators and others to strengthen the process and promote the independence of electoral management bodies, whether they are formally independent or part of the executive branch. UNDP country offices should also be more proactive in the period between elections to maintain relationships with such bodies and election-oriented civil society organizations (such as local observer groups) to promote improvements in electoral processes, electoral dispute resolution mechanisms, electoral management body independence and electoral law. Engagement with donors regarding post-election activities should begin long before the electoral event, in order to avoid losing momentum in the crucial months after an election. A post-election strategy that places due emphasis on sustainability and an exit strategy should be prepared as part of any election assistance project document.

Management response: The electoral cycle approach is being used by more than half of UNDP country offices undertaking electoral assistance. Some of the constraints in fully implementing the approach, however, are beyond UNDP control. These include the timeliness of donor funding and interest, the electoral management framework in place (i.e., whether an electoral administration is permanent or reconstituted before elections), and national funding and interest in the inter-election period. UNDP will endeavour to work on those variables within its control, such as ensuring that guidance on using the approach is available – particularly during the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and CPD drafting stages of programming – and the consistent use of electoral-cycle-savvy staff in the design of electoral assistance projects. GPECS will continue playing a vital role in promoting the electoral cycle approach with both donors and national counterparts by financing long-term initiatives between elections. To date, GPECS has supported electoral processes and institutions in 18 countries with a total allocation of $14 million (11 in Africa, one in Asia and six in the Arab States region). Moreover, regional initiatives, workshops and seminars, geared at advocating the electoral cycle approach, will continue to be organized on a regular basis across all regions.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
6.1 Ensure guidance of policy advisors familiar with the electoral cycle approach is available to country offices when designing and implementing projects and country programmes.	On-going	BDP, BCPR, regional bureaux and country offices		
6.2 Ensure electoral policies and guidance are easily available and in an accessible format that is frequently updated using the Teamworks platform and other methods.	Within 6 months	BDP		
6.3 Continue to foster South-South peer exchanges among electoral management bodies through established projects such as Pro-PALOP and new initiatives such as the SADC-ECF as part of a sustainability strategy.	On-going	Country offices, regional bureaux, BDP		

Recommendation 7: More emphasis and effort are needed to reduce the costs of some of the supported processes and ensure they are context-appropriate and sustainable. UNDP should renew and re-energize its efforts to develop cost-effective, sustainable solutions for electoral processes and institutions, and to build the national ownership needed to manage and maintain these systems. UNDP should facilitate the development of local solutions for local problems and avoid over-reliance on expensive imports, including inappropriate high-tech solutions implemented in low-tech contexts. UNDP should increase focus on strengthening national and, where relevant, subnational capacity and expertise for strategic planning, management, timely procurement and budgeting. Appropriate benchmarking, monitoring and budgetary controls should be considered in order to help foster cost-awareness. Elections are big business for some, particularly for vendors, and UNDP should assist electoral management bodies and civil society organizations in developing transparent and accountable procedures that reduce opportunities for economic and political corruption.				
Management response: Concerns about cost-effectiveness and sustainable solutions apply throughout UNDP work. This is an important consideration in electoral assistance programming but there are also limitations to how well UNDP can manage the costs of electoral assistance when, for example, a country makes a sovereign decision to schedule elections or adopt expensive systems and technologies, a national legal framework calls for certain technology to be used or when funding arrives late and drives up procurement costs. It is also important to realize that in some countries there will be a need for an initial large investment – for example, in a census, in identification cards or in a civil registry system – that will ultimately help to reduce the cost of elections. However, UNDP will step up efforts to help national electoral administrators to understand the implications of selecting technological solutions, including exploring local solutions, and to understand the importance of starting early, since starting late usually equals higher costs. UNDP will make a greater effort to balance economy, efficiency and effectiveness to ensure funds are being spent wisely in pursuit of local priorities. This means not only seeking to reduce costs and run electoral projects better, but also ensuring long-term capacity is built so that programme countries can run credible and sustainable elections on their own with little or no international help. UNDP will continue to organize workshops, conferences and seminars gathering EMBs, electoral practitioners and UNDP staff to raise awareness and to develop policy on issues pertaining to electoral processes. In 2012, a workshop of 230 participants was organized by UNDP in Mombasa, Kenya to highlight the appropriateness and costs of introducing ICTs in electoral process. This provided EMBs, UNDP staff and electoral practitioners with comparative information and data, analysis of timelines and costs, which will allow EMBs to effectively evaluate the choices available and make informed decisions regarding the possible introduction of technology in electoral processes.				
Key action(s)	**Time frame**	**Responsible unit(s)**	**Tracking**	
			Comments	**Status**
7.1 Develop guidelines based on the Mombasa conference to help national electoral administrators implement ICT solutions in a cost-effective and sustainable manner.	By fourth quarter 2012	BDP, regional bureaux, country offices		
7.2 Continue to place procurement, budgeting and operations advisory support at the disposal of national EMBs and country offices.	On-going	PSO, BDP, country offices		

Recommendation 8: UNDP should streamline its electoral assistance processes to ensure that they are more efficient in the fast paced environment of the electoral process they support. UNDP should review the chain of its electoral support processes from conceptualization to assistance delivery. Some procedural and efficiency issues are internal to UNDP, while others stem from the larger United Nations framework of response and require resolution. In particular, this applies to the relationship between UNDP and the Electoral Assistance Department and the extent of the latter's authority over UNDP programmes. Timelines to review include those pertaining to the receipt and processing of assistance requests, needs assessments and selection of their participants, and project formulation, negotiation and adoption. UNDP should also closely examine and streamline its recruitment and procurement processes. In addition, UNDP should encourage: the development of impact analysis for its work; a standard template to better track, monitor and report on the accomplishments of projects and their costs by intended outcomes; and more systematic efforts to document and share UNDP institutional memory. UNDP regional bureaux and the Bureau for Development Policy should strengthen oversight and monitoring of electoral programmes and improve the capacity of concerned staff, particularly for problematic processes or projects.

Management response: The newly revised needs assessment mission (NAM) guidelines are expected to facilitate the process (and speed) of request receipt, assessment (and who should participate in this process) and project formulation by UNDP, although last minute requests for assistance will continue to be made by Member States. The project formulation process should systematically give timelines for procurement processes, defining what is feasible and what is not. More specifically, UNDP will endeavour to involve operations experts at the project initiation stage, ensure procurement expertise is available throughout the project, draw up a procurement plan early on and make use of fast track procedures where beneficial. UNDP has developed a roster of vetted consultants that country offices may use to speed up the retention of experts. UNDP is committed to learning and improving its systems and approaches and will work towards better monitoring and evaluation in the area, although enhancing institutional memory requires United Nations-wide commitment. Reporting and tracking systems exist and are widely utilized but the reporting on electoral assistance in the ROAR is not fully accurate and includes gaps in the picture of where UNDP is working. On more specific operational issues, UNDP will continue to engage with the Operational Support Working Group (comprising DFS, DPA, DPKO, UNDP, UNOPS) which has been asked by the Policy Committee of the Secretary-General to advise on how to achieve greater efficiencies in system-wide operational support to elections, including in the areas of procurement, logistics, security, human resources and project management.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
8.1 Explore whether a standardized post-election evaluation or lessons learned exercises should be developed.	By end 2012	Evaluation Office, BDP		
8.2 Encourage the use of fast track procedures for electoral assistance and provide support to country offices making use of this modality.	By end 2012	BOM, BCPR, regional bureaux, BDP		
8.3 Explore the more systematic use of the Procurement Support Office to procure goods while promoting greater procurement of local services.	By end 2012	BOM (PSO), country offices, regional bureaux		
8.4 Continue to participate in the Operational Support Working Group to provide recommendations to the Policy Committee on how to improve operational support.	By second quarter 2012	BDP, BCPR		
8.5 Identify ways country offices can more comprehensively reflect electoral assistance in the ROAR/its successor.	By end 2012 and for next strategic plan	Operations Support Group, regional bureaux, country offices, BDP		
8.6 Consider preparing a regular (annual or	Feasibility assessed by end 2012	BDP with partners		

biennial) thematic publication on UNDP support to electoral assistance, which more fully captures electoral support and all of its variations.				

* Status of implementation is tracked electronically in the Evaluation Resource Centre database.